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UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL
27 October 1986

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By WENDY BENJAMINSON

WASHINGTON

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The CIA is recruiting big-city police officers to fight overseas terrorism and serve as temporary intelligence officers, an agency spokeswoman said Monday, but at least two police departments refused to cooperate.

CIA spokeswoman Sharon Foster said the agency has hired police officers in the past and the drive is similar to "the sort of program we had going for engineers and people we had a great need for in the agency."

Police officers have investigative skills required by the CIA, Foster said. Although they are not being recruited specifically to counter terrorism, "there has never been terrorism on as great a scale as it is now," she said.

It was unclear how many officers the CIA needs, or from what cities they were being recruited, but The New York Times reported Monday the agency contacted the police departments of New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, Houston, Boston and San Francisco.

The Times reported New York's police department has agreed to provide officers who retire, resign or take leaves of absence.

"They were told that the jobs were contracts for three years and that they would probably not be retained as permanent CIA employees," said Inspector Robert Burke, a New York police spokesman.

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New York Police Commissioner Benjamin Ward told the Times in an interview that CIA Director William Casey urged him and top officials from the other police departments at a meeting in July to help the recruitment project.

"Bill Casey informed us that the CIA was interested in hiring retired or presently employed police officers who had backgrounds in handling undercover operators or who had been undercover operators themselves," Ward told the Times. "We did not have terrorism before and we have to respond. It's laudatory that we can do something in the interests of national defense.

"I expect we will lose very few people," Ward said. "It is an overseas assignment under very dangerous conditions. But if anyone is interested, I won't hold him back."

Los Angeles police officials said Police Chief Daryl Gates rejected the CIA request. Gates would not comment directly on the CIA proposal but through a spokesman, Commander William Booth, said, "We need all the police talent we have right here," the Times said. The Los Angeles Sheriff's department also rejected CIA overtures. "The kind of people they would like to have we want to keep," said Los Angeles County Sheriff Sherman Block.

A few weeks after the July meeting a CIA representative came to Los Angeles "to pitch the program," Block said. "But there was no hard sell." A Houston police spokesman, Lt. Al Baker, said the CIA made a pitch for police recruitment during a summer department conference on terrorism.

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"At this point, the Houston Police Department is not actively participating in any recruiting effort for the CIA or FBI," Baker said.

Philadelphia Police Commissioner Kevin Tucker met with Casey in Virginia in July, said Capt. Richard DeLise, police spokesman.

"He did speak to Casey and thought it was very good interaction" because of the city's "We The People 200" celebration of the Constitution's bicentennial next year, DeLise said. DeLise declined further comment. Tucker was out of town and could not be reached.

Police spokesmen in Miami and Chicago said no police officials had been contacted by the CIA for any recruitment effort. A police spokesman in Dade County, Fla. -- the area surrounding Miami -- declined comment.

STAT CIA spokeswoman Cathy Pherson told the Times last week that CIA officials made the requests of 18 major municipal police departments for temporary assignments abroad at an unpublicized intelligence seminar on terrorism held by the FBI and the CIA July 21 at CIA headquarters in McLean, Va.

She said she believes this is the first CIA attempt to employ large numbers of trained police officers for intelligence work, but declined to say where the officers would be sent.